



Ronaldo slides in at the far post to claim Real's second goal, which secured a 3-2 aggregate win for the Spanish champions and sent his former club out of the Champions League at Old Trafford last night

Ronaldo leaves United seeing red

Real fight back to advance after Nani's dismissal ignites Old Trafford fury

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Sir Alex Ferguson was left seething with rage as Manchester United's Champions League dreams were crushed by Cristiano Ronaldo on a dramatic night at Old Trafford, when a hugely controversial decision to send off Nani helped to sweep Real Madrid into the quarter-finals.

United were leading 1-0 and in control when Cüneyt Çakır, the referee, inexplicably opted to show Nani a straight red card for an innocuous challenge on Alvaro Arbeloa in the 56th minute.

Real responded by scoring twice in the space of four minutes, with Ronaldo claiming the winning goal against his former club, as the Spanish champions secured a contentious 2-1 win on the night for a 3-2 aggregate victory.

Ferguson had raced out of his seat in the dugout to castigate Çakır at the time of the incident and was later seen pointing angrily at the Turkish official at the final whistle as the manager made no attempt to conceal his fury at a decision that swung the game in Real's favour. The United manager was also visibly annoyed at José Mourinho's decision to walk down the touchline before the pair had managed to shake hands at the end of the game.

Ferguson had dropped a bombshell by relegating Wayne Rooney from United's starting line-up — a move that plunged the striker's future at Old Trafford into fresh doubt — but the decision felt less of a shock than Çakır's reasoning for dismissing Nani.

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The Portugal forward had caught Arbeloa in the chest with a high boot, but there was no malice in the challenge and the player's eyes were clearly on the ball as he attempted to win it.

Sergio Ramos's own goal seven minutes earlier had given United a deserved lead, but when Luka Modric sent a blistering 20-yard drive past David De Gea in the 66th minute, United supporters must have begun to fear the worst and their misery was compounded soon after when Ronaldo

turned in Gonzalo Higuain's cross at the far post.

The former United forward had been given a rousing reception before kick-off, with Old Trafford breaking into rapturous applause when asked to show its appreciation for "the magnificent Cristiano Ronaldo". But until Nani's red card left him with more freedom, Ronaldo had disappointed, with the emotion of the occasion appearing to get the better of him.

Despite their disadvantage, United were unfortunate not to claim an equaliser late on, with Real indebted to Diego López, the goalkeeper, for making a string of saves to shut out headers from Michael Carrick and Nemanja Vidic, who had hit a post in the first half. Rooney also missed a chance when he blazed over from ten yards.

Roy Keane, the former United captain, questioned whether Ferguson's decision to omit Rooney was the beginning of the end for the player at the club. "I think it's a massive

blow for Wayne," Keane said. "He's a big player and he wants to play in the big games.

"He'll be bitterly disappointed to be left out. Wayne might be selfish about it and look at it and say the writing's on the wall for him."

There were eerie similarities with Ferguson's treatment of David Beckham, then the England captain, on the eve of United's Champions League quarter-final against Real a decade ago, when he was omitted from the starting line-up, a decision that effectively signalled the end of his Old Trafford career.

Beckham, who had come off the substitutes' bench to score twice in United's 4-3 win that night, accepted in the immediate aftermath of the game that Ferguson wanted to offload him and *The Times* revealed a fortnight ago that Paris Saint-Germain were interested in Rooney, with the French club prepared to spend heavily to sign a pedigree striker in the summer.

